

Below is a letter we sent to our clients in early 2018:

Dear Friends,

We hope this letter finds you and your animal family members happy and healthy. We are writing today to address concerns you may have about some cases of Canine Influenza recently identified in the San Francisco Bay Area. You may have heard about these cases through local news reports, friends, family, or other dog owners.

Understandably, this has created some anxiety and worry in dog owners. In an effort to inform, without creating undue worry, we have summarized some important facts about Canine Influenza Virus.

What type of illness does Canine Influenza Virus cause?

Canine Influenza Virus causes respiratory illness. Common signs seen with influenza are: coughing, loss of appetite, lethargy, fever, sneezing, ocular discharge, and nasal discharge starting 2-4 days after exposure. Most cases are mild, but a small percentage of dogs can progress to a more severe stage that includes pneumonia. Although this severe form can be fatal, the overall mortality from Canine Influenza is quite low.

How does a dog become infected with Canine Influenza Virus?

Dogs become infected through direct or indirect contact with expelled respiratory secretions from infected dogs. When infected dogs cough or sneeze the virus can spread easily. The virus is moderately stable and can survive outside of the animal in the environment for a day or two. This means that the virus can spread from dog to dog without direct contact between dogs. This usually occurs via contaminated clothing, surfaces, hands, etc. There is no evidence that this virus infects humans. Interestingly, it appears cats may be susceptible to infection, but the illness caused, if any, is mild.

What dogs are at risk?

Essentially all dogs are potentially at risk for infection. Taking your dog to areas where dogs gather or are in crowded conditions, such as kennels, dog day-care facilities, shelters, dog parks, grooming salons, dog shows, canine social events or public dog walking areas, puts your dog at a higher risk. As with most infectious diseases, puppies, elderly dogs, pregnant dogs, or dogs with pre-existing illnesses appear more susceptible to severe forms of the disease.

How do I reduce the chances my dog will be infected by Canine Influenza Virus?

While no practice is 100% protective, your best defense is to avoid any unnecessary trips with your dog to public places, kennels, or where they may be exposed to other dogs, where the risk of exposure is highest. As always, Redwood Veterinary Hospital uses careful isolation and aggressive disinfection practices to limit exposure to infectious diseases at the clinic.

Is there a vaccination for Canine Influenza Virus?

A vaccine is available that includes the two viral strains of concern. As in humans, Influenza vaccines are not perfect. The vaccine only produces a non-sterilizing immunity, which means that vaccinated dogs may still become infected and shed the virus, but vaccinating may reduce the severity of the illness. The initial vaccination needs to be boosted in 2-4 weeks, with benefit not being seen until 1-2 weeks after the 2nd vaccination. In short, this means it takes 4-5 weeks to get the benefit of the vaccination series. Annual boosters are needed to maintain protection. The vaccine appears to be well tolerated.

Our recommendation...

The American Animal Hospital Association establishes widely accepted guidelines for animal vaccination practices. They categorize the Canine Influenza vaccination as “non-

core"-meaning it should be used in those dogs at increased risk for exposure to the virus. Therefore, if your dog has some of the risk factors listed above, we recommend vaccination. Remember, it will take 4-5 weeks to adequately vaccinate a dog and during that time efforts should be made to reduce exposure risks. We have vaccine in stock at the hospital. Again, reducing the risk factors for exposure to Canine Influenza Virus is one of the best ways to protect your dog.

If your dog has been examined by one of our doctors in the past 12 months and is in general good health, we have approved our trained veterinary nurses to administer the vaccination. Otherwise, a doctor exam will be needed before we can administer the vaccine. Please to call us at (707) 553-1400 if you have any questions or if you are interested in making an appointment to start the Canine Influenza vaccine series for your dog.

Best regards,

The Doctors and Medical Team at Redwood Veterinary Hospital.